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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study assessing the viability of the non-K-12 organizational form as currently practiced in New York State. The study involved 26 non-K-12 sending districts (small elementary schools) and 29 K-12 receiving districts. Results are based on pupil test score performance at the secondary level and on 692 responses to a parent questionnaire. Students from non-K-12 districts enrolled in academic courses of study and passed Regents examinations in roughly the same proportions as did students resident in receiving districts. Respective sizes of the sending and receiving districts were unrelated to the relative academic performance of transferring students. Parent responses to forced-choice questions suggest relatively high levels of average satisfaction with various aspects of the non-K-12 organizational form. However, support was mixed with statistically significant differences in satisfaction and feelings of disenfranchisement across the 26 non-K-12 sending districts. Impediments to success with the non-K-12 form included inadequate transportation, the abruptness of the transition, inopportune grade levels of transition, calendar inconsistencies, inadequate communication, parental disenfranchisement, curricular inconsistencies, narrowness of choice, and inherent bias toward resident students. Recommendations to deal with all impediments are included. Appendices include the high school and parent survey instruments. (RAH)

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ED 380 245

An Examination of the Non-K12 School District Organizational Form in New York State

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Executive Summary

This study is part of a Board of Regents inquiry into alternative district organizational structures for New York State elementary and secondary educational offerings. The goal of the study is to assess the viability of the non-K12 organizational form as it is currently practiced within New York. A total of 55 districts (26 non-K12 sending districts and 29 K12 receiving districts) were involved in the study.

The results of the study are based on indicators of pupil test score performance at the secondary level as well as on the results of a questionnaire distributed to over 3,000 parents throughout the State. The parent questionnaire data include detailed written comments provided by parents to a series of open-ended questions.

The study reaches the following conclusions:

1. Students from non-K12 districts enroll in academic courses of study in roughly the same proportions as do their counterparts who are resident within the receiving districts.

2. Students from the non-K12 districts pass Regents examinations in roughly the same proportions as do their counterparts who are resident within the receiving districts.

3. Measures of various aspects of the fiscal capacities of both the sending and the receiving districts have little impact on the relative academic performance of students coming from the sending school district. The respective sizes of the sending and receiving districts are similarly unrelated to the transferring students' relative academic performance.

4. On balance, parents appear to be satisfied with the non-K12 organizational form, but their support is mixed and appears to be somewhat shallow.

5. Statistically significant differences exist in the parents' levels of satisfaction across the 26 sites that were studied. The parents' average level of satisfaction depends on the district in which the parent is located.

6. The fiscal capacities of both the sending and the receiving districts are poor predictors of the average level of parent satisfaction within each district.

7. District structural features such as their size and most especially the grade level at which the transition occurs are related to the average level of parent satisfaction with the organizational form within each district. Transitions at higher grade levels are associated with lower levels of parent satisfaction with the organizational form.

8. The levels of satisfaction revealed by parents for the governance structure tended to be lower than those found for other aspects of the organizational form.

9. As was the case for the other measures of satisfaction, there were statistically significant differences across the 26 sites in the degree to which parents from the non-K12 districts felt disenfranchised by the governance structure. In other words, the level of parent satisfaction with the governance structure depends on the district in which the parent is located.

10. Higher levels of fiscal capacity in the sending districts are associated with higher levels of parent satisfaction with their sense of connectedness to the receiving district's governance structure.

In summary, the data do not suggest that students or parents are disadvantaged by the non-K12 organizational form as it is currently practiced within New York State. But the data also reveal considerable variability across the sites in the level of satisfaction with particular applications of the organizational form.

The study's central summative conclusion is that the non-K12 organizational form has the potential to meet a wide range of needs and interests of students and parents in New York State. The study includes a series of policy recommendations for officials at both the local and State levels of decision making.

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I. Introduction and Background

Five indicators were used by the New York State Board of Regents in late 1992 to identify 139 school districts for participation in a study of organizational change. The indicators included: (1) the lack of K-12 continuity; (2) significant reductions in enrollment (declines of more than 50% since 1970); (3) high levels of overhead expenses (more than 30% of the annual operating budget (excluding debt service) on matters other than instruction; (4) high cost to the State (more than 80% of the district's revenues coming from State sources); and (5) high tax effort combined with low wealth (50% poorer than the State average with a local tax rate that is within the top 10% for the State).[1] Each indicator was chosen with the belief that it provided insight into a possible problem that lends itself to an organizational solution.

Further refinement of the indicators, including the use of updated data, reduced the number of identified districts from 139 to 81. 13 of the 81 districts chose to pursue the organizational change analysis through the use of an efficiency study grant (as provided for in current law). This left the Department with a total of 68 districts for what has been called a Phase I study. 26 of these 68 districts were on the list because of a less than K-12 organizational structure.

The purpose of the Phase I study for the non-K12 districts is to provide information that can help answer the following questions:

(1) To what degree does the transition between the sending and the receiving school generate difficulties for either students or parents? and

(2) To what degree do parents residing in a sending school district feel disenfranchised within the receiving school district's governance structure?

The larger goal of the Phase I study for the non-K12 districts is to assess the viability of the non-K12 organizational form. This is an important policy question for the State since the non-K12 organizational form can be viewed either as a problem in its own right or as a potential organizational solution to problems faced by other districts in their efforts to deliver high quality and comprehensive K-12 programs.

The Phase I studies of the non-K12 districts involved a unique collaborative effort. The studies were university based and drew explicitly on the expertise provided by officials from the local sites as well as from the State Education Department. In particular, a group of the local districts provided important assistance with the development of the study design and the data collection instruments.

Each of the identified non-K12 districts has received a draft copy of the Phase I study conducted for that site. These reports have also been shared with the relevant District Superintendent and State Education Department Field Team Leaders. These are reports back to the districts about both pupil performance levels and parental reactions to the non-K12 organizational

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[1] To be more precise, there was a 6th indicator: inadequate results. However, the development of criteria for the inadequate results indicator was deferred until completion of work by the State committee reviewing pupil assessment practices.

structure. No attempt was made to draw conclusions in the individual reports back to the districts. The purpose of these documents is to assist the local districts in their efforts to make sound decisions about their best organizational structure.

However, the Board of Regents is also seeking guidance in its deliberations about the future of the non-K12 organizational form and the purpose of this document is to assist the Board in these deliberations. Conclusions are offered herein about what the individual Phase I studies have revealed collectively about the viability of the non-K12 organizational form.

II. Conceptual Framework

Arguments in favor of the non-K12 organizational form typically involve the following claims: Whatever economies of scale are present within educational organizations arise primarily out of the secondary program where resources become highly specialized. At the elementary level, the economies associated with larger size are trivial. Moreover, at the elementary level there are significant advantages associated with smaller size: as a rule small size makes it easier to operate schools that serve well defined neighborhoods and/or communities. This facilitates parental involvement as well as a sense of community within the school itself. Travel times are kept to a minimum and this is especially important for young children who are just beginning to venture beyond their families. It is at the secondary level where larger size pays dividends and where students are sufficiently mature to handle the longer travel times. While a sense of community is important at the secondary level, the basis of the community tends to be less directly tied to residential communities. Indeed, the school itself can develop into the basis of the community and can serve to unify multiple residential communities. Athletic events, dramatic productions, music programs, and so forth can serve this purpose.

Arguments in opposition to the non-K12 organizational form can also be made. They typically involve the following claims: A separate organizational structure for small elementary districts permits localities to become highly ingrown and provincial. There are numerous missed opportunities to unify and build strong regional communities that are in tune with modern economic developments. The non-K12 structure also necessitates the use of a transition for students across organizational boundaries that can be highly disruptive and interfere with academic and social growth. The non-K12 organizational form also gives rise to numerous curriculum articulation problems, perpetuates the existence of small inefficient school districts, and undermines public confidence in the ability of educators to spend tax dollars wisely. Finally, problems can arise regarding the enfranchisement of the parents of students from the non-K12 district. In cases where these students transfer to neighboring districts on a tuition basis, there is no straightforward means of allowing these parents a full voice in the affairs of the receiving district.

Each side of the debate has some logical appeal and questions about the relative merits of the non-K12 organizational form can only be resolved through the careful conduct of empirical research.[2] It is the primary purpose of this synthesizing report to report the early results of this

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[2] For an overview of empirical research dealing with various aspects of the debate over optimal school district organization, see Monk and Kadamus (in press). For a recent assessment of the organization of New York State school districts, see Center for Government Research

type of a research program.

Given the fact that there are logical arguments to be made in support of as well as in opposition to the non-K12 organizational structure, it is reasonable to expect to find evidence of mixed results. This expectation gave rise to a list of school district structural features that are logically related to the success of the organizational form. The genesis of such a list presupposes clarity about what counts as "success of the organizational form." In keeping with the central questions motivating this study, the indicators of "organizational success" are based on two types of data: (1) pupil test score data for both transferring and resident pupils at the secondary level; and (2) data describing the perceptions of parents whose children crossed district organization boundaries to attend a secondary school program. The parent perception data set includes information about both student and parent experiences.

Pupil Academic Performance Levels

Table 1 presents a list of district structural features that can be linked logically to the academic performance of students who cross district organizational boundaries as they move to their secondary program of study.

Table 1

School District Structural Features That Are
Logically Connected to the
Success of Transfer Students Who Have
Experienced the Non-K12 Organizational Form

Structural Feature	Logical Connection
Fiscal Capacity of the Sending District	Students coming from better endowed elementary programs will be more able to recover from the disruption occasioned by the transfer.
Fiscal Capacity of the Receiving District	Better endowed secondary programs will be better equipped to meet the needs of the incoming transfer students.

(1993). For insight into the New York State Education Department's ongoing study of organizational change, see New York State Education Department (1992).

Table 1 continued

Discrepancy Between the Fiscal Capacity of the Sending and the Receiving Districts	When the discrepancy is large, there will likely be socialization problems and transfer students can be expected to face difficulties establishing functional communities and a sense of belonging.
Size of the Sending District	Indeterminate: Small size may lead to limited programs which give rise to later difficulties; or small size may give rise to more personalized attention which has subsequent beneficial effects.
Size of the Receiving District	Indeterminate: Large size may lead to more specialized resources that can more adequately meet student needs; or large size may create a more impersonal environment that interferes with transfer students' progress.
Concentration of Pupils from the Sending District	The larger the concentration of transfer students, the greater success they are likely to have at establishing themselves in the receiving district. The resulting level of "comfort" can be expected to enhance performance for the transfer students.
The Point At Which the Transition Occurs	Earlier transitions make it easier for incoming students to establish a sense of belonging within the receiving school.

Parent Perceptions of the Non-K12
Organizational Structure's Success

Two school district structural features are of particular interest in the attempt to understand the sources of parental satisfaction (or its lack) with the non-K12 governance structure. First, there is the discrepancy between the fiscal capacities of sending and receiving districts. There is reason to suspect that the magnitude of this discrepancy will have bearing on parental satisfaction. In particular, large discrepancies can be expected to have negative effects on parents' levels of satisfaction.

Second, there is the concentration of pupils from the sending school within the receiving secondary school. Here the impact on parental satisfaction and perceptions of responsiveness on the part of the receiving district is difficult to deduce a priori. On the one hand, a higher concentration could make the receiving district more responsive to non-resident parents and thereby contribute to parent satisfaction; on the other hand, a higher concentration could give rise to greater frustration on the grounds that the district is governed officially by a potentially small minority of the affected clientele.

III. Data and Methods

Data were collected from three sources. First, a survey was distributed to the 29 school districts that receive students from one of the 26 identified non-K12 districts (see Appendix A for a list of the 55 sending and receiving districts and Appendix B for a copy of the high school survey). The survey requested information about pupil test score performance on Regents examinations, Advanced Placement examinations, and Regents Competency examinations. Districts were asked to report separate results for transfer and resident students. The information describing Regents exam results was the most complete, and it serves as the basis of the pupil test score analysis that is reported below.

The second data source involved the administration of a survey to parents of students who are or who previously attended one of the non-K12 districts in the study. This questionnaire was developed collaboratively with a group of non-K12 districts in the Albany region. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about parent perceptions about their children's experiences in both the sending and receiving school systems as well as information about the parents' perceptions of how responsive the receiving school's administration has been to their interests. In addition to a series of 12 forced choice questions, the questionnaire gave parents the opportunity to respond to several open ended questions. A copy of the parent questionnaire appears in Appendix B.

A total of 3,034 surveys were distributed. 692 usable surveys were returned. The overall response rate was 22.8 percent.

The third source of data was information routinely collected by the State Education Department regarding various aspects of a school district's fiscal capacity and size. Three measures of fiscal capacity were used: full value real property wealth per pupil, income per pupil, and the incidence of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunches (the FRPL count).

District size was measured in terms of district enrollment levels.

The District Superintendents with identified non-K12 districts located within their supervisory districts provided invaluable assistance with the study. They coordinated the collection of mailing labels for the parent questionnaires from the non-K12 districts and they arranged for the collection of test score results from the receiving high school districts.

Emphasis was placed throughout the Phase I study on collaboration and good communication between the State and the local sites. Districts had the option of going beyond the study design employed by the State and to submit the results of their efforts as part of Phase I. Several districts responded in this way.

The reports back to the individual districts make explicit references to particular districts, schools, and individuals. A number of these comments are "unvarnished" and ad hominem in their nature. They are, nevertheless, a part of the environment in which the schools operate, and it is appropriate for officials within the districts to have access to the information. However, for the purposes of this synthesizing report, the identity of individual districts and schools is not important and is not revealed. The goal here is to make progress toward making generalizations about the conditions under which the organizational form does and does not succeed.

Finally, it is worth noting that the outcome measures used in this study are at best problematic. Numerous logistical barriers limited the ability to reach parents directly. The State does not maintain a central data base that permits a direct contact with parents. This information needed to be sought from the individual districts and districts vary widely in how detailed, up-to-date, and retrievable this information is. There is also the problem of parents fearing the involvement of the State Education Department in this sensitive area of public policy. The local districts informed parents that the surveys would be forthcoming and encouraged parents to respond, but there is little doubt that some parents viewed the State's involvement with alarm and that this alarm could have affected both response levels and the character of the responses that were received.

The pupil test score data are also problematic. Regents test data have the advantage of being subject-specific but there is the accompanying disadvantage that only the percentages of students taking and passing the examinations are recorded. However, the pupil test score data, in contrast to the parent perception data, permit comparisons between transfer and resident students. The data gained from parents reflect the perceptions of just those parents whose children experienced a transfer across districts to their secondary program. The absolute rankings of these parent perceptions have meaning, but it would have been preferable, although not practical, to make direct comparisons with the parents of resident pupils in the receiving districts.

IV. Findings

Pupil Academic Performance Levels

Pupil Course Taking Comparisons

Students from non-K12 districts who subsequently enroll in a K12 district's secondary program (on a tuition or some other basis) are considered "non-resident" students for the purpose

of these analyses. The first performance indicator is the incidence of Regents Diplomas. This is a global measure of academic inclination at the secondary level and provides a useful starting point.

In 1993, on average, the per cent of non-resident (i.e., transfer) students who graduated with a Regents diploma was 1.0143 higher than the corresponding per cent of resident students who also earned Regents diplomas. In other words, the respective percentages of students differ by 1.43 per cent. The standard deviation for this comparison statistic was 0.58.

Information was also collected about pupil performance on Regents exams. Table 2 reports the average performance levels for non-resident and resident students on selected Regents exams.

Table 2

Comparisons[3] Between the Performance of
Resident and Non-Resident Students in
New York State School Districts:
1993 Regents Course Taking[4]

Percentage Taking the Regents Course

	Mean	St.Dev.	N
Mathematics-Course I	0.95	.75	21
Biology	1.19	.75	21
Chemistry	1.13	1.04	18
English	1.25	.97	20
U.S. History	1.16	.85	20

With the possible exception of the results from mathematics, these findings suggest that students transferring from a non-K12 district are as or more likely than resident students to pursue

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[3] Each cell entry is a ratio of two percentages. The numerator is the relevant percentage for the students coming from the non-K12 district. These are the non-resident students. The denominator is the relevant percentage for the resident students within the receiving K12 district. Thus, a cell entry of 1.3 indicates that the percentage for the non-resident students from the non-K12 district is 30 percent larger than the corresponding percentage for the resident students.

[4] Regents exams are part of a statewide examination program for academically inclined students. Strictly speaking, these statistics measure the incidence of students who sat for the Regents examination in the so-called "Regents courses."

academic programs at the secondary level. However, these are simple comparisons between sending and receiving districts that do not account for other possible background influences on decisions students make about courses of study to pursue. For example, socio-economic status has bearing on academic aspirations, and it may be that sending and receiving districts differ, on average, in their respective wealth and incidence of poverty statistics. Table 3 demonstrates that these differences do in fact exist among the districts being studied. In particular, the non-K12 sending districts tend to be wealthier both in terms of income and real property wealth than their receiving district partners; the incidence of poverty (as measured by the incidence of pupils who are eligible for free or reduced price lunches--FRPL) is also lower in the sending compared to the receiving districts.

Table 3

Comparisons Between Selected Economic Background Characteristics For Non-K12 and K12 Partner Districts in New York State

	Ave. Ratio[5]
1991 Income Per Pupil	1.21
1991 Full Value Property Wealth Per Pupil	2.26
1991 Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunches (FRPL)	.75

Thus, care needs to be exercised when simple comparisons are made between characteristics of the nonK12 and their partner districts, and efforts are warranted to control for the effects of background wealth characteristics.

Recall from Table 1 that these indicators of district fiscal capacity were also logically linked to the relative success of transfer students. It is therefore especially important to both control for and isolate the effects of district fiscal capacity (for both the sending and the receiving districts) on pupil performance. It is also important to assess the effects of the discrepancy between the respective fiscal capacities of the partner districts.

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[5] The numerator in each ratio is the indicated statistic for the non-K12 district. The denominator is the corresponding figure for the relevant partner K12 district. In cases where a non-K12 district sends students to multiple K12 districts, each partnership is treated as a separate match.

A variety of statistical techniques were used to examine these relationships, and the results indicate that measures of the absolute level of district fiscal capacity for the sending as well as for the receiving districts are in most cases very weak predictors of student Regents course taking behaviors. For example, bivariate regression models showed that in no case did the fiscal capacity of the sending district explain more than 13 percent of the variance in the relative incidence of Regents diplomas. The maximum variance explained by the receiving districts' fiscal capacity never exceeded 5 per cent. In the case of Course I and Biology Regents course taking, the maximum level of variance explained never exceeded 12 per cent. Somewhat greater predictive power was found for the Chemistry, English, and History areas of the curriculum where the maximum amount of variance explained reached 21 per cent.

Similar levels of predictive power were found for one of the measures of discrepancy between the fiscal capacities of the receiving and sending districts in the models attempting to explain student Regents course taking behaviors in Chemistry, and English, and History. Here the explanatory power of the discrepancy between the real property wealth per pupil of the sending and the receiving districts explained 20, 25, and 28 per cent of the variance, respectively.

While the explanatory power of the models differs substantially depending on the type of Regents course being considered, what is interesting is that in all cases where a relationship appears to exist, the relationship is negative. For example, large discrepancies between the per pupil property wealth of the sending and the receiving district (such that the sending district's fiscal capacity is large relative to that of the receiving district) are associated with a lower incidence of transfer students taking Regents Chemistry, English, and History courses relative to resident students. Thus, there is some evidence suggesting that large discrepancies between sending and receiving districts' fiscal capacities have a negative impact on transfer students' inclination to pursue an academic curriculum. However, it needs to be kept in mind that this result appears inconsistently. What is clear is that a large discrepancy between the respective fiscal capacities of the sending and the receiving districts is not associated with an increased likelihood of transfer students pursuing an academic curriculum.

Recall from Table 1 that there are reasons to expect district structural features other than their levels of fiscal capacity to have bearing on the academic performance of students making the transition across school districts. Four characteristics were singled out for study: (1) the size of the sending district, (2) the size of the receiving district, (3) the degree to which the number of students from the sending district is large relative to the number of resident students, and (4) the grade level at which the transition occurs.

None of these district structural features proved to be a powerful predictor of student course taking practices. The maximum amount of variance that was explained by any of the variables was 12 per cent, and most of the bivariate regression models explained less than 10 per cent of the variance. The data offer little evidence to support the hypothesis that district size and the timing of the transition affects the academic inclination of students coming from non-K12 districts.

Pupil Test Score Comparisons

Attention turns next to comparisons of Regents exam performance levels among those students who sat for the exam. The fact that students select themselves and/or are selected for these courses of study provides an additional means by which to control for the effects of social

and economic background characteristics. Unlike the comparisons of the incidence of course taking, most of the students examined here have opted for the college bound curriculum.[6] In other words, the college bound students' performance from the sending district is being compared to the college bound students' performance who are resident within the receiving district.

Table 4

Comparisons[7] Between the Performance of
Resident and Non-Resident Students in
New York State School Districts:
1993 Regents Exam Passing[8]

Ratio of Per Cent Passing (Sending/Receiving)

	Mean	St.Dev.	N
Mathematics-Course I	1.07	.24	18
Biology	1.00	.16	19
Chemistry[9]	1.17	.17	13
English	1.06	.17	17
U.S. History	0.98	.19	17

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[6] To be more precise, not all of these students have "opted for" the college bound curriculum. Some high schools offer only the Regents exam version of these courses.

[7] The cell entries are a ratio of two percentages. The numerator is the relevant percentage for the students coming from the non-K12 district. These are the non-resident students. The denominator is the relevant percentage for the resident students within the receiving K12 district. Thus, a cell entry of 1.3 indicates that the percentage for the non-resident students from the non-K12 district is 30 percent larger than the corresponding percentage for the resident students.

[8] Regents achievement exams are part of a statewide examination program for academically inclined students.

[9] The figures for Chemistry reflect the exclusion of an outlier case which distorts the results because of the very small numbers of students that are involved. With the inclusion of the outlier, the mean is 1.85 and the standard deviation is 2.56.

Table 4 makes it clear that among those students sitting for Regents achievement exams, students experiencing a transition across school district boundaries pass the exams with roughly the same or higher frequency than do their resident counterparts in the receiving districts. It is also worth noting that there is less variation across the sites in this performance indicator than was the case for the measures of academic course taking.

The next step in the analysis involves the attempt to identify correlates of the variation in the relative passing rates. The goal is to identify structural characteristics of the sending and receiving districts that are associated with relatively high test score passing levels on the part of the students making the transition across the district boundaries.

Again, an extensive examination of bivariate regression models revealed little evidence to suggest that the fiscal capacity of either the sending or the receiving district has much bearing on the relative passing rates of transfer students. The one exception to this result occurred in Biology where the evidence suggests that high levels of both income and real property wealth in the sending district are associated with relatively high passing rates. In these models, the bivariate regression model explained on the order of 1/3 of the variance in the outcome indicator. However, the maximum explanatory power of the model in all other subject areas was 17 per cent. In English, for example, the amount of variance explained never exceeded 9 per cent, regardless of the fiscal capacity indicator that was used.

The limited explanatory power of these measures of fiscal capacity can be partly explained by the limited amount of variation found in the outcome indicator (see Table 4). The sample may simply not be adequate to test the proposition that fiscal capacity and discrepancies in fiscal capacity have bearing on pupil performance. However, the data may also be showing that aspects of district fiscal capacity are not closely connected to the success of the non-K12 organizational form.

The data also suggest that district size (both that of the sending and the receiving districts), the concentration levels of students from the sending districts within the receiving districts, and the timing of the transition have little systematic impact on the relative passing rates of students who experience transitions across district boundaries. However, there are several cases where isolated relationships appear that are of some interest. For example, in the case of Course I, the data suggest that students coming from smaller non-K12 district perform at higher levels than do their counterparts from larger non-K12 districts. This negative relationship persists when a control is included for the property wealth of the sending district. However, sending district size has little impact on pupil performance in the other subjects areas studied.

Parent Satisfaction With the Organizational Form

The data collected from parents living in non-K12 districts deal with two inter-related phenomena: (1) parent perceptions of how well both the sending and receiving districts meet the needs of their children, and (2) parent perceptions of the receiving districts' responsiveness to their involvement in the district's affairs.

There are two types of parent data that address these issues. Parents responded to a series of forced choice items that attempted to gauge their levels of satisfaction. They were also asked to respond to several open-ended questions that provided an opportunity for more personalized

responses. A remarkably large number of parents responded, sometimes at great length, to the open-ended questions. All of these written responses have been shared with the participating districts. A number of the particularly interesting comments appear in this report.

Forced Choice Responses

Averages for the sample. Table 5 presents averages for the entire sample of questionnaires on those items that deal with the parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in either the sending or the receiving school district as well as their perceptions of how well they themselves have been treated by the receiving districts.

Table 5

Summary of Parental Responses to Questions About the Experiences of Students and Parents With the Non-K12 Organizational Form

(Four Point Scales: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree)

	Mean	St.Dev.	N
1. I believe my child enjoys/enjoyed his/her high school experience	1.93	.79	660
2. I believe the high school made a special effort to welcome my child to the school.	2.07	.83	669
3. I believe the high school encourages/ encouraged my child to participate in non-required elective courses.	2.22	.89	649
4. I believe the high school encourages/ encouraged my child to participate in extra-curricular activities.	2.16	.92	648

Table 5 Continued

5. I believe that my child's elementary and middle school education has effectively prepared him/her for his/her high school experience.	1.96	.85	668
6. I believe my child's high school education has effectively prepared him/her for experiences after high school.	2.15	.86	562
7. I believe my child experienced a smooth transition to the high school programs.	2.09	.79	673
8. I believe that the administration in the high school welcomes my views about the school policies.	2.41	.88	579
9. I believe that I have been invited and encouraged to participate in activities pertaining to my children's education in the high school to the same extent as resident parents.	2.16	.84	649
10. I believe that school officials pay as much attention to the views of parents from the elementary/ middle school district as they do the views of resident parents.	2.43	.93	580

Table 5 continued

11. Overall performance of the elementary/ middle school district. (5 point scale: 1=excellent, 2=very good, 3=good, 4=fair, 5=poor)	2.23	1.09	672
12. Overall performance of the high school district. (5 point scale: 1=excellent, 2=very good, 3=good, 4=fair, 5=poor)	2.62	1.13	669

There are several things to notice about these average scores. First, with one exception (Item 12), they are all less than 2.5, and this suggests relatively high levels of average satisfaction with various aspects of the non-K12 organizational form. Second, while they tend to be less than 2.5, a relatively large number of the items are close to 2.5, suggesting that non-trivial numbers of parents were responding with 3 (disagree) and 4 (strongly disagree) to the indicated items. The average score falls below 2.00 for only two of the items, and one of these (Item 5) deals with the elementary/middle school district performance. Third, the parents appear to be more satisfied with the elementary than with the secondary program (compare items 5/6 and 11/12). Fourth, the questions asking about parents' feelings of being connected to the governance of the receiving district revealed some of the most negative scores. Two of the three items (Items 8 and 10) recorded average scores that are close to 2.5. And finally, there is a noteworthy level of variation in how parents responded to these questions, particularly in the summative rankings of the elementary and secondary schools. The presence of this variability prompts a search for its correlates with the hope that insight can be gained into what contributes to parental satisfaction.

An important initial question to resolve is whether there are systematic differences across the districts in how parents responded to the questionnaire items. A oneway analysis of variance statistical procedure was run on each of the questionnaire variables using the districts' identity as the independent variable. In <u>all</u> cases, knowledge of the identity of the sending district makes a significant difference in how parents responded to the questions. In other words, it is <u>not</u> the case that highly satisfied and highly disgruntled parents are randomly distributed across the districts in the sample. Instead, there is strong evidence suggesting that the level of satisfaction depends on where the parent is located. The next step in the analysis involves seeing if progress can be made toward explaining the variation that can be observed across the districts being studied.

<u>Success at meeting students' educational needs</u>. Most of the forced choice items on the questionnaire deal with parent perceptions of how well the schools met the needs of their children. Recall from Table 1 that there are reasons to expect a series of district structural features to be related to pupil performance. Regression models were fitted in order to estimate the magnitude and direction of these relationships. Explicit attention was paid to all seven of the structural features that were identified in Table 1. Given the policy making interest in the between district variation in the indicators of parental satisfaction, the district is the unit of analysis for all of these regression models.

A number of interesting results emerged from these analyses. In particular, the fiscal capacity measures proved to be very poor predictors of parental levels of satisfaction with their children's academic program. In only one case was a statistically significant estimate obtained, and in the vast majority of the cases the level of variance explained was on the order of less than 5 per cent.

The remaining structural features of the districts (their size and the point at which the transition occurs) proved to be better predictors of parent satisfaction levels. The most consistent effect emerged for the point of transition variable. This variable was linked to the parents' sense of how welcome their children were in the receiving high school, how much encouragement the parents felt their children received to enroll in elective courses, and how much encouragement the parents felt their children received to participate in extra-curricular activities. In all these cases, the higher the grade at which the transition occurred, the less satisfied the parents reported being. Higher grade transitions were consistently associated with negative parent perceptions across all of the items, although some of the relationships were stronger than others.

There was also some evidence suggesting that parents in larger sized sending districts were less satisfied with the high school program than were parents from smaller sending districts. This relationship appeared most clearly in the case of parent perceptions of encouragement for participation in extra-curricular activities as well as in the case of parent perceptions of how well the high school prepared students for experiences after high school. It is interesting to note that the size of the receiving district was not related to any of the parent satisfaction indicators.

Success at making parents feel enfranchised. There is evidence suggesting that the real property wealth of the sending district is positively related to the level of parent satisfaction with their inclusion in the governance of the receiving district. Parents from high wealth sending districts reported feeling both more invited and taken more seriously than did their counterparts in lower property wealth sending districts. A similar though less strong result was obtained for the income levels of the sending districts. In contrast, the fiscal capacity of the receiving district had little connection to parent attitudes about their level of enfranchisement.

None of the size variables made a difference in terms of parent satisfaction with district governance. And, once again, parents coming from sending districts where the point of transition is at a high level reported being less satisfied with governance in the receiving districts.

Discussion. There are several points worth making before attention turns to the parent responses to the open-ended items.

1. It is significant that fiscal capacity measures proved to be poor predictors of both relative pupil test score performance and indicators of parent satisfaction levels with the academic aspects of their children's secondary school program. It does not appear to be the case that the non-K12 organizational form's performance is sensitive to the fiscal capacity levels of either the sending or receiving districts. Moreover, this result holds for several different dimensions of fiscal capacity, real property wealth, income levels, and the incidence of pupils living in poverty, to be precise.

2. Where fiscal capacity of the districts does seem to matter is in the area of parent perceptions of their inclusion in the governance affairs of the receiving districts. Recall that parents from wealthier sending districts felt more enfranchised. It may be that these parents are more skilled at participating in governance affairs and find it easier to surmount whatever barriers the district boundary presents. This finding may also suggest that steps

can be taken within the existing governance structure to address the views of parents from outside the district.

3. It seems quite clear that points of transition between sending and receiving districts at higher levels are associated with higher levels of parent disgruntlement about both their children's educational opportunities and their own sense of efficacy within the receiving district. It is hard to think of convincing reasons for transitions at the upper end of the range observed in these data. The highest point of transition in these data occurred between grades 9 and 10.

Open-Ended Question Responses

The data that were collected for this study include a rich set of parent reflections on what it is like to be part of a non-K12 governance structure. It is possible using these data to "read between the lines" and to gain insight into important but sometimes intangible aspects of the organizational form. As was indicated above, all of the parent comments were returned to the participating districts. The discussion that appears here draws on this large collection of comments and attempts to shed light on aspects non-K12 districts that cannot be dealt with using the test score and forced-choice items that have been relied upon so heavily in previous sections of this report.

Testimonials in Support of the Non-K12 Organizational Form

The data contain a number of sometimes quite poignant defenses of the non-K12 type of district. Here are some examples:

"I have heard that the state is against the idea of small districts, especially those without high schools. I hope that the state will not attempt to change a local situation which residents find satisfactory and desirable in order to meet some need of state government. I have two children, one a senior, the other a sophomore, and I am very pleased with the choices we have. I certainly hope that the local choices we have enjoyed can be preserved for others. These two districts are very special and the sizes are manageable and the people are wonderful. Please don't force any changes from the state level."

"My daughter feels well accepted and is having a positive high school experience. N._____ prepared her well academically as well as built her self confidence and school/community spirit."

"The transition from N._____ to N._____ was great!! My son adjusted very well, and has made numerous new friends, which has helped to "round-him out" and expose him to life outside our small town."

"I believe that the present system where the N._____ children have the opportunity to attend school across the river gives them a sense of freedom. They meet children from the

N._____ and N._____ areas as well as children who have lived all over the world. It is a growing experience that N._____ cannot offer. It is working. Please don't change it."

"N._____ has done wonders for our child. He is truly treated as an individual and the entire staff is very dedicated. Communications are great between teachers, students and parents. Our concerns of going from a very small school (93 class= 13 students) to a large were immediately put to rest."

"I had two sons that graduated from N._____ and one daughter attending high school at this time. All enjoy their schools and teachers. We consider ourselves fortunate to have the "so called" neighborhood school system, where our children don't have to worry about getting lost in a larger centralized school system."

"I have felt that the very small population of N._____ school has been both a benefit and a hinderance. The staff does an excellent job trying to meet the needs of the students and to individualize instruction. The small class size is certainly a plus. But on occasion, the narrowness of the peer group has limited the students' opportunities to be exposed to a variety of people and life styles. Moving into the larger student body at N._____ with students from other areas and ethnic backgrounds has been a very positive change for my son."

"Parents in the N._____ district are more involved in their children's school because they all stay in the same school for nine years (K-8). After nine years you know every teacher, principal, most parents, most of the kids, and everything about the school and their programs. This involvement tends to carry over into high school. I hear parents in other school districts complain that by the time they get to really know the school, the child has to transfer to a middle school then a junior high then a high school. I think other school districts should consider going back to the neighborhood school system (K-8 all in one building) and it would solve a lot of problems with the kids today."

"We have been very happy with our children's education at both N._____ and N._____. It has been very beneficial for the children to be supported in a small school setting during the elementary and middle school years and then look forward to a larger school district for high school with more social functions and extra-curriculum events. We have the best of both worlds."

There are several interrelated themes running through these positive comments. The satisfied parents claim that the organizational form permits a high and desirable degree of individualization at the elementary school level. They see the accompanying personal support as an important means of developing students' sense of self-worth and they believe that it positions these students well for their subsequent educational experiences. They speak of smooth transitions between the sending and receiving school districts and are pleased with the broadened range of opportunities and outlooks that can be found within the larger receiving high school program. Finally, these parents appreciate the opportunities to choose among alternative secondary school

programs. They appear to believe that the freedom to "vote with their feet" creates sufficient *accountability incentives to ensure a meaningful role in school district affairs.*

Testimonials in Opposition to the Non-K12 Organizational Form

Of course, not all parents are so positively impressed with the non-K12 organizational form. Here are some examples of difficulties some parents perceived:

"Nobody cares it seems in Albany that our small K-8 district has to tuition out (its students for) high school. There should be fewer school districts. Merging of small districts to one large (district) would save money for us taxpayers and I believe give the children a more diverse and solid education."
"We have gone to soccer games etc. and we just feel like an outsider. All we hear is "you are a N._____ parent" or "your child is a N._____ student."

"By tuitioning our students out, you now have a community that could care less what happens to our school. If you asked most people I think they would say close the school. Get our children into a school system early enough so they don't feel like outsiders when they get in high school. I'm just discouraged with the whole thing. My child is having an awful time trying to fit in and at this point in time is flunking three major courses. Tuitioning these students out is a nightmare."

"It seems "unbalanced" that N._____ (the non-K12 district) provides 75% of the high school students at N._____ (the receiving high school district), yet we have no voice because we "are not taxpayers in N._____ District," I would like to see state forced mergers in situations like ours. Without us--they have no student body, without them--we have no high school, yet they hold all the power over program, policy and personnel. We do not even get an opinion, much less a vote.

"There should be N._____ (the non-K12 district) residents on N._____'s (the receiving district) school board. Taxation without representation. Whatever they say our kids are to do we have no say. There was more than 75% of tuition students attending their school, but they rule.

"Tuitioning was a bad idea. Rather than splitting up the children after being together for eight years. The N._____ district should have either merged with another school or worked on improving our high school. By merging schools, the children would not be treated as outcasts moving in on the other school children's area. Also the parents of the merging school would have an equal say in the budget and the activities of our children."

"We are very thankful that our children made it through school before the tuitioning."

"Under the present system, nothing can be done. We are from a different district and have no say."

"It was very hard on our first child as it was the first year of tuitioning and his senior year. He's still very bitter about it. It was easier on our second although she wanted to go to a school further away and we chose one within 10 minutes of our house. Now she's very happy. The distance of some of the schools is a big factor--especially with both parents working. Our third child was eager to go."

"Most people feel that a small school education is the best. After having 3 children go through this type of school, I can honestly say that they might have been better off in a larger school. Aside from the obvious advantages, some of the disadvantages I saw were that the children are stereotyped from grade 1 as all the teachers know what each and every child is doing. Also, small classes do not always stimulate the social education of the children. I also believe the teachers get "burned-out" faster--there are fewer new experiences, ideas, personalities, etc.

"We on the north fork of Long Island present an unusual situation. The north fork is approximately 25 miles long and 3-4-5 miles wide. It is punctuated (?) (excluding Shelter Island) with 7 elementary school districts and 3 K-12 school districts. All buildings are in need of much repair. All support superintendents, principals, etc. All educate small numbers of children. Consolidation would improve the total (sports, academics, etc..) educational experience for our children. Albany must demand it of this extremely provincial area."

"There has to be more interaction between the two districts. Administrators "say" they interact but they don't in a way that is conducive to the needs of the students. I have been in touch with 20 years worth of students going from one school to another and I have never heard of a tuition student not having great difficulty adjusting. The change comes too late in time. Relationships are very established by 9th grade and 9 years of the same 15-25 students in one class is too much."

"In this day and age for residents to support such a small school as N._____ is ridiculous. The socialization in a small school does not prepare our young people to mainstream into high school. The present 8th grade class only has 10 students. Yet the high school has unused classrooms, with up to 500 students in 4 grades. The teachers in N._____ are some of the highest paid in the state, and for only working 180 days. I would like to see our tax dollars used for better purposes. In these small schools the students are truly the ones who suffer."

"We are not a part of the high school district, therefore they don't care."

"Tuitioning students to three different schools is crazy. There has been nothing but problem after problem for the last 5 years. The school should be closed or merged with

another. At least the high school kids could feel like it was theirs too instead of a paying customer. The taxpayers could also feel a part of things."

"I am a believer in a middle school concept, particularly because I live in a "sending" (tuition paying) district. I feel our elementary school is too confining and restricted in what it can offer. I also believe our children are not adequately prepared in math and science, and the foreign language program is a waste of time (once a week for 1/2 hour is pathetic). It is not economically feasible to provide additional programs to such a small student population, and the students are the ones who are short-changed. Because we are a single-school district, our fixed overhead is steep; again, program funding suffers. I am in favor of a study to determine the feasibility of consolidating our district with neighboring districts."

"Everyone tries hard but I feel the time has come to consolidate or centralize. We must be equal and same at all levels."

"It is extremely frustrating to send one's child out of his/her own district for h.s.--especially in this situation where the home district is virtually ignored. I will say that the high school teachers for the most part were above average educators. The school board is dominated by the superintendent, and he ignores most situations. The children had no dances, get togethers or much social contact ("It was too much trouble") Therefore most of them couldn't wait to 'get out.'"

There are several themes that emerge from these negative comments. The sources of parent dissatisfaction seem to center around parent perceptions that (1) they are disenfranchised from the governance of the receiving district; (2) they and their children are made to feel like outcasts within the receiving school district; (3) the quality of the elementary program suffers from being too provincial and limited due to the small school size; and (4) the organizational form generates unnecessary burdens on taxpayers.

Reconciling the Positive and Negative Sentiments

The sharpness of the differences in these parent perceptions is not surprising in light of the advantages and disadvantages that can be associated with the non-K12 organizational form. It seems clear that as the non-K12 organizational form is practiced currently in New York State, there are cases where it works relatively well just as there are cases where it works relatively poorly as far as the affected parents are concerned.

For policymaking purposes, the fact that parents disagree over the viability of the organizational form is not particularly helpful or even interesting. What is more relevant is insight into the sources of the disgruntlement as well as satisfaction. The relevant policymaking question is whether there are steps that can be taken to reduce the frustrations and problems and make the desirable results more likely.

The parent comment data were reviewed with an eye toward identifying particular sources of difficulty with the organizational form. The data revealed a number of what might be called "impediments" to successful results with the organizational form. The types of impediments that parents spoke of are described below along with illustrative quotes from the parents' comments.

Impediments to Success With the Non-K12 Organizational Form

Inadequate Transportation

Recurring comments appear that point to transportation problems. These are clearly more serious as distance and geographical barriers increase. Here are examples of what the parents had to say about transportation difficulties.

"N._____ has an excellent late bus system for children who participate in sports.

"Bus ride from here is an hour, and the bus often arrives late at the high school."

"My one complaint concerns busing for sports events. N._____ (of non-K12 district) does not give students transportation to Saturday bowling activities. N._____ (receiving district) has a bus for its residents."

"After sporting events the buses do not go through N._____ (non-K12 district) to drop off the students (majority) but returns to N._____ (receiving district) where parents have to pick up or the students must board another bus to go to N._____ (non-K12 district)."

"As a working parent, I am not able to get the school to pick her up if she stays or rather would like to. I think it would be beneficial to have a "late bus" run to N._____ so our students can participate like the other students."

"Earlier arrival of buses to high school instead of 2 minutes before classes begin."

Abruptness of the Transition

Many of the parents perceived the period of transition from one district to the next as a potential source of difficulty and offered suggestions for how to make the process easier for the students. Here are some of the suggestions:

"All students should be advised of sport programs which commence in August. N._____ students were not notified."

"There were no problems. We had involvement with community programs so he had friends there when he arrived."

"It went very smoothly for my children because of 6th grade exchange programs and meetings with parents. Possibly another parents meeting at beginning of 7th grade in the new school would be beneficial to give parents a chance to meet each other and faculty."

"Our high school sends out newsletters periodically and urges us to attend board meetings. Perhaps bi-monthly reports on what's coming up would be helpful."

"I feel the schools did as much as could be expected in this area. I think the parents should be responsible for being very involved in this transition."

"A two or three day "buddy system" at N._____ High in which a N._____ student (in the receiving district) serves as "buddy" for a N._____ (sending) School student."

"If our daughter was not involved in sports, it would have been much more difficult. Sports broke the ice because it started in August." (She) met new people before having to start school."

"Children making the transition need to be actively invited to participate in sports, clubs, activities. They need a designated person who knows them to show them the layout of the school and the in's and out's."

"Big brother or sister for the 1st week. written information regarding the start and tryouts for fall sports."

"Transition was smooth mainly because the majority of N._____ (sending district) students chose to attend the same high school.

Inopportune Points of Transition

Given the statistical findings reported earlier, it is not surprising to find that parents in districts where the transition takes place at relatively high grade levels had negative comments to make. Here are some examples:

"The children from N._____ have a more difficult time making social adjustments in the 9th grade level, when all the other students have known one another for three years. The students from N._____ (the receiving district) also have an advantage getting on teams and in things like the band."

"I think the transition was made easier when our elementary school ended at 6th grade. The children entering the high school environment at 7th grade rather than 9th gave them time to assimilate."
"Have students enter at the 6th grade level, not the 9th."

"We feel that tuitioning should start in junior high school (7-8) instead of waiting until high school (9-12). These students need a chance to work with the new teachers before taking high school courses. They need to get a "real feel" of the school and what teachers expect from them before being thrust into a high school situation. This includes sports too. These students need to work together on junior high sports teams before they are expected to try-out for varsity and junior varsity teams."

"By starting in junior high, the language department could be able to adequately teach the Spanish course, so that the high school students would be equally prepared to complete the course with other 9th and 10th grade students from the new high school.

"N._____ school is one of a very few which go to 8th grade. The transition is difficult--you go from a class of 15-20 to a freshman class of 400. Perhaps N._____ should consider stopping at 6th grade, and letting the kids move on before the cliques have formed. N._____ kids have already formed their groups by 9th grade and it's hard to break into when you're considered an outsider. While the small classes are beneficial in the early grades, by 7th and 8th they're really ready for the "bigger" world.

"I also believe our elementary school should be K-6 rather than K-8, with the transition at the middle school level."

"An opportunity to make the transition at a younger age (5th grade to 6th, not 6th to 7th grade when it is more difficult to integrate with children who have attended the tuition district for many years together."

Calendar Inconsistencies

Problems can arise for parents when school schedules conflict. For example, if the sending school is not in session, bus transportation may not be available for students who are tuitioned into a neighboring district, even if the neighboring district is open and holding classes.

"The transportation-- i.e., no school for N._____ (sending district), no transportation to N._____ (receiving district)--so they miss out that day if parents can't supply transportation.

Inadequate Communication

Good communication with families and communities is an ever-present challenge for school districts. There is reason to believe that it is an especially large challenge in districts that serve several communities. A number of the parents were outspoken on this issue.

> "They should send newsletters to us. There should also be a late bus. My son has had to stay and I receive a letter stating the late bus will take him home. They don't even realize there is none."

> "When she was in 8th grade, our daughter was advised by the high school guidance counselor (who had just met her) to take a lower level freshman English (course) despite her 98 average and the fact (that) English was one of her favorite subjects. We insisted she be allowed to take honors English. She graduated from high school with an English average in the high 90's and AP credits toward college. Clearly, there could have been better communications between the guidance staff at the 2 levels."

Disenfranchisement of Parents

The potential for parents to feel disenfranchised is very real given the provisions of current law in New York State. A number of the parents commented explicitly about their frustration:

> "Coming from an out of district school, I feel we have no real involvement with governance of the high school. As we are not allowed to "vote" on any issues pertaining to the school where our children spend 4 years of their lives. There should be some way we could participate in the voting when it actually involves the education and well being of our students. Going through our own school district doesn't work."

> "Our only regret as parents is that you lose your voting power. I feel that this is a great disadvantage, not having a "say" as to who gets on the board, etc. This should be a great consideration, especially in these times of tax-pac, etc."

> "We are not permitted to vote on decisions concerning high school because we live in N._____ (sending district), not N._____ (receiving district)."

> "The high school is too far away to get involved. It is located in a different county and that area is served by different local newspapers, etc."

In addition, a number of the parents described how they coped with the problem or offered suggestions for ways to better meet their needs. Here are some examples of these comments:

> "I always felt very involved by trying to attend joint board meetings and by communicating with the N._____ (sending district) Board of Education."

> "The N._____ (receiving) School Board should allow the N._____ (sending) School Board to elect a liaison to attend N._____ (receiving) School Board meetings. Our children from N._____ (sending) do make up 75% of the student population. The N._____ (sending) School Board has agreed to allow a liaison from N._____ (receiving) to attend our meetings."

> "Our site based committee at N._____ (receiving) high school has a representative from our district and welcomes our opinions.

> "Have an official representative from the sending school sit in on the receiving school's board meetings to provide liaison and to report back to the sending board."

> "I feel the 2 school boards should meet a few times throughout the year with a specific agenda. The 2 school superintendents do not always convey the most accurate information and can unintentionally give board members a wrong impression."

> "When possible, co-ordinate dates and times of general meetings (i.e., Board of Education and parents/teachers meetings) so as not to conflict with meetings of sending districts."

Curricular Inconsistencies

There were, surprisingly, few comments about curriculum articulation problems. Here is one example:

> "When my son went into the honors program in math (which he was recommended for) they found out that they had changed the program in their elementary program to better prepare their students for honors. They never told our elementary school, so my son had so much trouble he dropped out and is no longer in the honors program."

However, the data contain several comments about problems with guidance; one of these appears under the communications heading.

Narrowness and Dependability of Choice

The opportunity to make choices among alternative secondary programs is one of the reputed advantages of the non-K12 organizational form. Parent comments suggest that the meaningfulness of this opportunities varies widely across the sites.

> "The decision to "tuition out" high school students was a very good one and should have been done years earlier. My only criticism is that little or no geographical consideration was given to the school districts we as parents had to choose from. As a result my son must be transported 15 miles using two different buses each morning and afternoon while we live only 4 1/2 miles from another excellent high school (which was not one of the three we were able to choose from)."

> "The biggest problem with high school is the lack of discipline and it is a very poor district which limits the school as to what they can do to implement better programs. The school could not remain open were it not for our tuition as was demonstrated when several parents this year wanted a different high school. It was war!! Our N._____ students make up more than half of the honor roll students even though so few are in each class."

> "I do think only one school should have been chosen--given a choice of 3 is too much for an eighth grader and also hard on the parents. A merger would have been more permanent and better than tuitioning."

> "My son originally transferred to N._____ high school in N._____. He remained at this school for only 4 months. While there he was suspended from school 2 times for minor discipline problems and was failing his courses. At that point, I transferred him to N._____ (second receiving) high school. At N._____, for the past year he has not once been disciplined with suspension and he has made honor roll with his grades several times."

> "It is not only unique but in a way essential for our community that the children are offered a choice of high schools. The choice recognizes that children have different needs and as young adults make decisions according to those needs. N._____ (receiving) offers a very similar environment to N._____ (sending) and N._____ (second receiving option) offers a larger experience which prepares them for college and/or independence."

> "There's been much controversy in recent years in our district about high schools--where and how many should be designated to receive our kids. I felt the district

has found a good balance, allowing a choice of three local high schools, each with its own strengths. Now we have to work hard to build a communication network so our kids and their families as well as our Middle School staff knows what to expect in high school and our children can enter any of the three choices knowing they are well prepared and properly placed."

"My child had to visit all 3 schools within a week and a half. These visits should have been spread out so the children could have had more time to compare the schools good and bad points."

"In our school district after 8th grade our children must make a choice between two high school.s Both are very close. One is in our town and the other is across the N._____ River. Because our ele-middle school is very small, the students become very close. It is a very very difficult time when they must make the choice of which h.s. to attend. The majority of the students attend N._____ which is across the river. But, so far 3 of my children have chosen N._____ which is in N._____, where we originally lived."

"The students at N._____ are very fortunate. They can choose to attend one of three high schools. While the large majority select N._____, others go to N._____ and N._____. Each offers something different and the students are fortunate to be able to elect the program and school they like best."

N._____ (receiving district) not only has a full range of sports programs available, but is well equipped in the academics and arts, as an additional incentive. My children have all been honor students and have needed the course selection at N._____. Neighboring high schools <u>do not</u> offer the same challenges. My oldest daughter's success at SUNY Geneseo is a result of the input she received at N._____.

<u>Inherent Bias</u>

One parent made a revealing comment about how he/she feels about the non-K12 structure. It suggests a generalized level of frustration that does not lend itself to obvious solution.

"Unfortunately, I feel no matter what--favoritism will always be shown to (resident) district high school students when it comes to sports and academic achievement awards. It is a fact we must face without our own high school."

One of the striking things about these perceived sources of difficulty is how they can be divided between those for which there are relatively obvious and straightforward solutions and those for which there is no clear answer. As an example of the former type consider the comments made about transportation. It is clear how to meet this need. Late buses can be run to the sending

district. The real difficulty here revolves around the extra costs and their disposition. As an example of the latter type, consider the final category: "Inherent Bias." To the degree that inherent bias exists between two communities it is hard to imagine a successful application of the non-K12 organizational form. Moreover, it is hard to generate suggestions for what policies might be pursued.

IV. Conclusions and Implications for Policy

Conclusions

The school district survey data permit insight into the overall effects of the non-K12 organizational form on the academic performance of the students who cross organizational boundaries in order to receive their secondary level program. The central findings are these:

1. Students from non-K12 districts enroll in academic courses of study in roughly the same proportions as do their counterparts who are resident within the receiving districts.

2. Students from the non-K12 districts pass Regents examinations in roughly the same proportions as do their counterparts who are resident within the receiving districts.

3. Measures of various aspects of the fiscal capacities of both the sending and the receiving districts have little impact on the relative academic performance of students coming from the sending school district. The respective sizes of the sending and receiving districts are similarly unrelated to the transferring students' relative academic performance.

In short, there is little in the school district survey data to suggest that the non-K12 organizational form has an adverse impact on the academic performance of students who experience the transition across district boundaries.

The parent survey data permit insight into the effects of the non-K12 organizational form on parent perceptions of their children's experiences. The central findings are these:

4. On balance, parents appear to be satisfied with the non-K12 organizational form, but their support is mixed and appears to be somewhat shallow.

5. Statistically significant differences exist in the parents' levels of satisfaction across the 26 sites that were studied. The parents' average level of satisfaction depends on the district in which the parent is located.

6. The fiscal capacities of both the sending and the receiving districts are poor predictors of the average level of parent satisfaction within each district.

7. District structural features such as their size and most especially the grade level at which the transition occurs are related to the average level of parent satisfaction with the organizational form within each district. Transitions at higher grade levels are associated with lower levels of parent satisfaction with the organizational form.

The parent survey data also permit insight into the parents' own sense of connectedness to the receiving districts. The central findings are these:

8. The levels of satisfaction revealed by parents for the governance structure tended to be lower than those found for other aspects of the organizational form.

9. As was the case for the other measures of satisfaction, there were statistically significant differences across the 26 sites that were studied. In other words, the level of parent satisfaction with the governance structure depends on the district in which the parent is located.

10. Higher levels of fiscal capacity in the sending districts are associated with higher levels of parent satisfaction with their sense of connectedness to the receiving district's governance structure.

To sum up, the data do not reveal any compelling evidence that students or parents in general are disadvantaged by the non-K12 organizational form as it is currently practiced within New York State. But the data also reveal considerable variability across the sites in the level of satisfaction with the particular applications of the organizational form.

The most prudent conclusion to draw is that the non-K12 organizational form has the potential to meet a wide range of needs and interests of students and parents in New York State. The challenge for policymakers, at both local and State levels, is to devise means by which this potential can be realized.

In reaching this conclusion, several caveats need to be kept in mind. First, the indicators of pupil academic performance are at best limited. While it is true that these data do not reveal compelling evidence of pupil disadvantagement, it is of course possible that more refined indicators would lead to very different conclusions. However, this kind of caveat would apply to any set of performance indicators. It is always possible to improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of a set of measures, and it is always possible that the more refined data would generate conflicting conclusions.

Second, it needs to be kept in mind that this study has not dealt explicitly with the fiscal costs of the non-K12 organizational form. Parents made occasional reference to these matters in their comments, but a formal cost/benefit analysis was beyond the purview of the study.

It is useful to consider the nature of the burden of proof that needs to apply in the debate over the viability of the non-K12 organizational form. The question being addressed concerns the viability of an organizational form that is up and running in New York State. Given the fact that the form is currently in use and that its elimination would undoubtedly create disruption, cost, and difficult to anticipate burdens, it seems reasonable to require evidence of compelling harms before steps are taken to significantly curtail or eliminate the availability of the organizational form. This study did not produce evidence of compelling harm.

However, it is also possible to promote the increased use of the non-K12 organizational structure in New York, particularly for the numerous existing small K12 districts that dot the landscape of this State. Here the fact that satisfaction with the organizational form appears to be mixed is quite relevant. Something more is needed to justify the expanded use of the form than the absence of evidence of compelling harm.

The data collected and analyzed as part of this study permit insight into steps that can be taken to make the non-K12 organizational structure a more successful organizational alternative. There are implications for officials at both the local and State levels, and the final sections of this report provide an overview of these suggestions.

Implications for Policymakers at the Local Level

What follows is a list of suggestions gleaned from the parent comments about steps that can be taken to make the non-K12 organizational form function more effectively. The suggestions are organized according to the impediments that were found to generate parental dissatisfaction.

Transportation

1. Provide high school options that are located as closely as possible to the sending non-K12 district. "Closeness" involves more than geographical distance. Ideally, there should be matches between newspaper markets, labor markets, and regional affiliations. If most everyone in a sending district shops in a particular town, then it is desirable for the high school in that town to be among the options available to the families in the non-K12 district.

2. Provide late bus service that meets the needs of both resident and tuitioned students. Factor the costs into the tuitioning arrangement that is made between the sending and receiving districts.

Smoothness of the Transition

3. Make sure there is a critical mass of students entering each receiving district from the sending district.

4. Plan explicitly for the transition period. Involve parties from both the sending and the receiving districts. Make efforts to establish links between communities in ways outside of the schooling system.

5. Be sensitive to the role athletics and extra-curricular activities can play in smoothing the transition across districts. Perceptions that non-resident students are discriminated against are easily formed and difficult to dissipate. Efforts to be sure that transferring students are aware of tryouts and other opportunities to participate can pay handsome dividends.

Point of Transition

6. Structure the tuitioning arrangement so that the transition across districts occurs earlier rather than later in students' programs. Tuitioning arrangements appear to work best when

the mixing occurs when other students in the receiving district are being similarly mixed. Parent comments suggest that the results are best when the out of district students are added to the receiving district at the same time that resident students are being mixed. For example, if several elementary schools within a receiving district funnel students to a middle school at grade 6, grade 6 would be a good time to add students from outside the district.

Communication and Calendar Coordination

7. Make explicit efforts to think systematically about the effects of local policies on partnership districts. For example, calendars for all cooperating districts should be coordinated as closely as possible.

Disenfranchisement

8. Avoid partnership arrangements where the incidence of students from the non-K12 district is large relative to the number of resident students in the receiving district. This tends to exacerbate parent feelings of being disconnected from the governance of the receiving district.

9. Experiment with alternative means of involving parents from the non-K12 district in the governance affairs of the receiving district. Options include scheduling periodic joint meetings for the boards of education, appointing liaisons from the non-K12 to participate in meetings of the receiving district's Board of Education, and working with emerging shared decision making committees to ensure representation of the non-K12 district.

Curriculum Articulation

10. Make efforts to plan curricula collaboratively across the participating districts. Rather than think of the collaboration as something that occurs only during the transition students make at the beginning of each school year, broaden the effort so that it includes regularly scheduled periodic meetings between the faculties of all feeder schools (including those located within as well as outside of the receiving district). Teachers should have the opportunity to share what they are doing so that more is known about the nature and extent of the curricular material that is being dealt with. Teachers from the feeder schools also need to know what their students will be experiencing in the years to come. Anything that can be done to foster the amount of curricular knowledge and understanding across the divide between sending and receiving schools (regardless of the district boundaries) will have beneficial effects.

Range of Choice

11. Take steps to broaden the range of choice that is available to parents and students in the K12 districts. The opportunity to exercise choice counts as a very real benefit of the non-K12 organizational form that is balanced against some very real drawbacks. It makes sense to broaden the range whenever this is possible. The arrangement appears to work best when students from the sending district divide themselves across the receiving districts so that each receiving district is supplied with a critical mass of students. The magnitude of the critical mass is difficult to define precisely, but it should be large enough so that the receiving district has an incentive to be attentive to the group's needs and so that individual members of the group feel as though they have a basic community that remains intact within the receiving school.

Implications for Policymakers at the State Level

This study provides information that is relevant to several ongoing debates over State policy regarding the organization and reorganization of school districts. In particular, the study speaks to the ongoing debates over regional high schools, the expanded use of the non-K12 organizational form, and the institutionalization of greater choice within public school systems. The data indicate that the non-K12 organizational form can work well and meet the needs of a broad range of students and parents. Some of the impediments and barriers that were found to limit this success would be addressed by new administrative forms such as a regional high school. In a regional high school the tendency for students and parents from sending school districts to feel dominated and disenfranchised within the receiving district ought to be minimized. In a regional high school approach, no single district would enjoy the status of being the receiving district. All participating students would be coming from "outside" the district.

However, it needs to be recognized that the success of regional high school approaches will likely depend in part on geographic features of the participating districts. Population sparsity and long driving distances can limit the viability of a regionalized approach to the delivery of secondary school services.

The findings about the limited impact played by various aspects of districts' respective fiscal capacity on the success of the non-K12 organizational form are important. These results suggest that it is possible to mix quite different types of communities and not compromise the ability of the district to function.

The worrisome element that persists even in the face of this encouraging news about the potential viability of the non-K12 form and the prospects of innovative reforms that involve regional secondary programs is the potential for some variant of "inherent bias" to thwart the success of the approach. This report contains suggestions about how to overcome the various impediments that seem to exist, but there can be no guarantee that deeply ingrained suspicions and hostilities across communities can be overcome. It seems best to recognize that these inherent biases can and do exist, that they are difficult to overcome, that they should not be allowed to so dominate thinking about alternative organizational forms that all progress is stymied, and that local officials are in the best position to assess the extent and nature of whatever inherent biases may exist in a given region.

The non-K12 organizational form offers considerable promise, particularly if it is designed to take advantage of on-going improvements in educational technology, communication, and reforms in school and district governance. Properly designed and implemented, the form can meet the needs of a broad range of stakeholders within educational systems. It is an organizational form that warrants further examination and monitoring. As the Organizational Change Study process initiated by the Board of Regents continues, it makes good sense to seek opportunities to experiment with alternative versions of the non-K12 organizational structure.

V. References

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New York State Education Department (1992). Memorandum to the Board of Regents, Item for Discussion, Attachment to BR (A) 3; December 10, Author.

Appendix A

List of Districts Participating
in the Phase I Study of
Organizational Change for Non-K12 Districts

Non-K12 Sending Districts Identified by the Board of Regents for a Phase I Organizational Change Study	Receiving Districts
Amagansett	East Hampton
Brunswick Common	Troy City
	Averill Park
	Brunswick Central
East Moriches	Westhampton Beach
	Center Moriches
	Eastport
East Quogue	Westhampton Beach
Edinburg	Northville
Garrison	Highland Falls
	Haldane
Greenwood Lake	Tuxedo
Laurel	Mattituck-Cutchogue
Lyncourt-Salina	Solvay
Maplewood	North Colonie
	Watervliet
Menands	North Colonie
	East Greenbush
	Watervliet
Oysterponds	Greenport
Piseco	Wells
Pocantico Hills	Tarrytowns
	Briarcliff
Putnam Central	Ticonderoga
Putnam Valley	Lakeland
Quogue	Westhampton Beach
Raquette Lake	Indian Lake
	Town of Webb
Remsenberg-Speonk	Westhampton Beach
Sagaponack	East Hampton
Springs	East Hampton
Tuckahoe	Westhampton Beach

Wainscott
Wheelerville
Wynantskill
Wyoming

South Hampton
East Hampton
Johnstown
Troy City
Alexander
Attica
Pavilion

Appendix B

Copy of the High School Survey

See Attached

Copy of the Parent Survey

See Attached

The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Central Services
Room 504 Education Building
Albany, New York 12234

Note: This survey should be completed by a senior level administrator employed by a district that receives students from a separately organized elementary/middle school district.

Name of Receiving School District	
Name of Sending District	
Name of Person Completing Survey	Title
Telephone . ( )	

1. Enrollment of the 12th Grade Class

Year	Total 12th Grade Enrollment	12th Grade Enrollment of Tuition Students from Sending Districts*
1989		
1990		
1991		
1992		
1993		

2. Incidence of Regents Diplomas

Year	Total Number of Regents Diplomas	Number of Regents Diplomas Received by Tuition Students from Sending Districts*
1989		
1990		
1991		
1992		
1993		

* Students who are residents of an elementary/middle school district but who attend this school on a tuition basis or some similar arrangement.

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	3. 1993 Regents Examination Taking Behaviors		4. 1993 Regents Test Score Results		5. 1993 Regents Average Scores	
	Total Number of Students Taking the Exam	Total Number of Tuition Students Taking the Exam from Sending School*	Total Number of Students Passing the Exam	Total Number of Tuition Students Passing the Exam from Sending School*	Average Score for All Students Taking the Exam	Average Score for Tuition Students Taking the Exam from Sending School*
ATH						
Course I						
Course II						
Course III						
IENCE						
Earth Science						
Biology						
Chemistry						
Physics						
NGLISH						
English 11						
OREIGN LANGUAGE						
French						
Spanish						
OCIAL STUDIES						
Global Studies						
U.S. History & Gov't						

* Students who are residents of an elementary/middle school district but who attend this school on a tuition basis or some similar arrangement.

	6. 1993 Incidence of Students Taking Advanced Placement Courses		7. 1993 Performance on AP Exams		8. 1993 Student Performance on Statewide Testing Instruments	
	Total Number of Students Taking the Course	Total Number of Tuition Students Taking the Course from Sending School*	Average Score for All Students Taking the Course	Average Score for Tuition Students Taking the Course from Sending School*	Average Score for All Students Taking the Exam	Average Score for Tuition Students Taking the Exam from Sending School*
ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES						
U.S. History						
Biology						
Chemistry						
Physics B						
Physics C						
Computer Science A						
Computer Science AB						
Math Calculus/AB						
Math Calculus/BC						
English Literature & Comp						
French Language						
Spanish Language						
REGENTS COMPETENCY TESTS						
RCT in Writing						
RCT in Reading						
RCT in Math						
RCT in Science						
RCT in U.S. Hist. & Govt.						

* Students who are residents of an elementary/middle school district but who attend this school on a tuition basis or some similar arrangement.

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Albany, New York 12234

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY

This survey is designed to assist in a study of students who attended elementary/middle school in their home district but received their secondary education by attending high school in another district. The purpose of the study is to help better prepare students for their high school experience.

Name of your Elementary/Middle School District: _____

Name of high school my child attends or graduated from: _____

If your child graduated from high school, please check the year:

1989	☐		1992	☐
1990	☐		1993	☐
1991	☐			

Diploma Received: .....

Regents	☐	IEP	☐
Local	☐	N.A.	☐

How long have you resided in your Elementary/Middle School District:..... _____ Years

Please answer all of the following questions by checking the appropriate box. Also, please feel free to make any comments concerning any of the following questions. Use additional sheets as necessary.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)	Undecided (5)
1. I believe my child enjoys/enjoyed his/her high school experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I believe the high school made a special effort to welcome my child to the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I believe the high school encourages/encouraged my child to participate in non-required elective courses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I believe the high school encourages/encouraged my child to participate in extra-curricular activities.....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)	Undecided (5)
5. I believe that my child's elementary and middle school education has effectively prepared him/her for his/her high school experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I believe my child's high school education has effectively prepared him/her for experiences after high school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I believe my child experienced a smooth transition to the high school programs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)	Undecided (5)
8. I believe that the administration in the high school welcomes my views about the school policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I believe that I have been invited and encouraged to participate in activities pertaining to my children's education in the high school to the same extent as resident parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I believe that school officials pay as much attention to the views of parents from the elementary/middle school district as they do the views of resident parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

11. What specific courses or programs would you like to see offered by your elementary/middle school district which would better prepare students for high school?

_____

_____

_____

12. What specific courses would you like to see incorporated into the curriculum at the high school level which would better prepare our students for experiences after high school?

_____

_____

_____

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS (continued)

13. What could have been done to make the tranistion to high school smoother for your child?

_____

_____

_____

14. What could be done to increase your sense of involvement with the governance of the high school?

_____

_____

_____

Overall Performance. Based upon both your experiences within the elementary/middle school district and the high school from which your child is attending or has graduated from, please rate both programs by checking the appropriate box.

	Excellent (1)	Very Good (2)	Good (3)	Fair (4)	Poor (5)
1. The Elementary/Middle School District	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. The High School Attending/Graduated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What additional information can you share that you believe should be considered in this survey. (Use additional sheets as necessary).

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your help.
Please use the enclosed stamped envelope to return your survey.

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